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ABSTRACT

This report provides a detailed analysis of the video use and preferences of Swedish adolescents based on data drawn from the Media Panel project, a three-wave, longitudinal research program on video use conducted at the Department of Sociology, The University of Lund, and the Department for Information Techniques, the University College of Vaxjo, Sweden. Data were gathered in 1982 through in-depth interviews with 46 ninth grade subjects from Vaxjo who had earlier indicated that they used video in questionnaire surveys in December 1980 and March 1981. The introduction to this paper discusses (1) whether individuals are uncritical, passive recipients of mass media messages, or (2) whether both individuals and social groups actively select and use media to achieve various gratifications. The subject group is then identified in its sociological context and the media content it uses, and an analysis covers the relationship of uses and preferences to the social groups' values and feelings. The discussion of results covers the extent of viewing and analyzes viewing habits according to age, sex, and social background. Quotations excerpted from the interviews illustrate various points. Forty references are listed. (LMM)

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THE INFLUENCE OF VIDEO TECHNOLOGY IN ADOLESCENCE

media
panel

report no.27
June 1983

KEITH ROE

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INTRODUCTION

The videogram was the vanguard of the revolution. As the first of a series of technological innovations which will radically change the electronic communications environment it signalled the beginning of the end of the unchallenged supremacy of direct broadcast television. In Sweden the market take-off year for video was 1981 and since then sales of videograms have grown apace, making Sweden one of the countries with the highest percentage of videograms per household in the world.

The videogram did not come unattended, however. The fact that many young people were seen to be among the first heavy users, combined with the fact that the material available for hire was at the outset dominated by violent, horrific and pornographic material gave rise to a widespread and powerful public debate which raged throughout 1981 and 1982. Indeed it would probably not be too much to say that Sweden experienced a 'moral panic' over video viewing by children and adolescents, to the extent that video came to satisfy some of the criteria for being labelled a 'folk devil' (see S. Cohen 1972). As the debates raged, however, as the newspaper pundits wrote and the social scientists arranged conferences the voice of one group was drowned by the din of righteous indignation, namely that of those teenagers who actually watched video films.

While this neglect may be historically true to form in debates surrounding aspects of what can roughly be called 'popular culture' we may well ask ourselves whether it is a valid starting point for social scientific inquiry. Neither is this neglect a mere oversight in the heat of debate, on the contrary, it is the perfectly logical result of one of the dominant explanatory paradigms in the social sciences concerning the relationship between human beings and the media of communication. This perspective, a kind of variation of the theme of 'the massacre of the innocents', sees humans as the essentially passive recipients of 'mass' media messages which 'work them over' in various ways and which have largely negative, destructive consequences. Inevitably in discussions informed by this approach questions are couched in terms of 'what media do to people', rather than in terms of 'what people do with media'. The title of what I am supposed to be talking about today faithfully follows this tradition: 'The Influence Of Video Technology In Adolescence'.

Yet before I proceed to a detailed analysis of adolescents' uses of video I propose to re-examine the terms of the discussion.

THE MEDIA AUDIENCE: ACTIVE OR PASSIVE?

Are individuals more or less uncritical, passive, recipients of the latent and manifest messages transmitted by the mass media or do people both individually and in social groups actively select and use media to achieve various gratifications? The answer provided to this question may depend largely upon which concepts of 'popular culture' and the 'mass media' are employed. There is a good deal of conceptual confusion surrounding both terms, not least from the fact that the 'popular' metaphor is often used interchangeably with the 'mass' metaphor, while the whole area suffers to some degree from the problems inherent in the concept of 'culture' itself.

The 'passive' audience perspective may be traced to two more or less dominant schools of thought. The first is that which has been termed 'rediscovered and contemporary marxism' (Gramsci, Lukács, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Althusser etc), (see Swingewood 1977). This position it has been claimed leads to 'a static and pessimistic concept of the social formation'. In addition this approach, together with the second major school - literary cultural theory - tends to abstract the concept of culture from the social structure and to study it from 'a crude consumptionist' perspective. Behind both of these approaches, it is claimed, lies an implicit theory of 'mass society', defined sociologically as,

"lacking strong independent groups and institutions a society dominated from above" (Swingewood 1977, p 11).

This society is, moreover, seen as having a centralized mass media which dominates and manipulates an undifferentiated mass of consumers. In these formulations, it is claimed, there is an elitist conception of culture and a pessimistic dismissal of the working class, a radical pessimistic view characterizing such diverse figures as Wright, Mills, Adorno and Marcuse and mirroring the conservative pessimism of Eliot and Gasset. In short for Swingewood there is no such thing as a mass culture or a mass society. There is only an ideology of mass culture and mass society (ibid p 119).

As Roe (1983) has noted the 'mass' metaphor has been frequently applied to industrial societies ever since the development of indust-

rialism. The 'mass society' metaphors of the 19th century slipped easily into the terminology applied to the media of communications in the 20th. Moreover the dangers of the crude 'mass' perspective were pointed out very early by cognizant observers. As Briggs (1977) has reminded us,

It was a Leeds clergyman of the 1840's who with great perception warned his readers of the dangerous lure of the word 'masses'. 'Our judgements', he stated, 'are distorted by the phrase. We unconsciously glide into a prejudice. We have gained a total without thinking of the parts. It is a heap, but it has strangely become indivisible'. (Briggs 1977, p 62.)

Williams (1976a, b) has also voiced a telling critique against the use of the term 'mass' in communications research. For him the mass metaphor has had a 'disastrous' effect upon the study of the media, firstly because it implies a large, undifferentiated, unlimited audience and secondly, and perhaps most damagingly, it had the lingering effect of equating people in 'masses' as being 'inherently stupid, unstable and easily influenced', so that the only thing worth asking was whether people were 'corrupted' (Williams 1976a).

A further aspect of the 'passive audience' approach which needs to be examined is its individualistic bias. Media are seen as acting directly upon individuals who are abstracted from any contact with social structure, in a way best summed up by the 'bullet' analogy of effects 'fired' from the medium into the individual. This bias has been called into question by, amongst others Fine (1977) and Lull (1982). Fine has noted that audiences are discussed as if people attended events alone, an assumption frequently not accurate (even for TV where the average number of viewers may be two or three). Media 'consumption' it is claimed frequently occurs in groups and this fact needs to be heeded if we are to understand the effects of group interaction on content appreciation and evaluation. Thus the importance of popular culture is seen, 'more in its subsequent usage than in its momentary impact' (Fine 1977, p 463). This is not to deny the individual level of analysis but merely to refine our perception of individuals as they are, namely, individuals acting in social groups located within a social structure. Any comprehensive analysis of media uses should try to take account of all of these mediations.

An alternative approach to the passive individual-powerful media perspective is, however, available. This research tradition is largely represented by the so-called 'uses and gratifications' approach which

sees the audience as composed of active, selecting agents using the media of communication to extract gratifications for pre-existing needs (see Blumler and Katz 1974). The 'uses and gratifications' approach was an important step forward in communications media research and its switch of focus onto the active audience opened up a number of fields of inquiry. As McQuail (1972) has remarked, 'if the media are more acted upon than acting, it has profound implications for the kinds of questions one asks.'

A major drawback of the uses and gratifications approach, however, was the fact that it was still individualistic in emphasis and, in addition, laid stress on the notion of 'needs' - a notoriously slippery concept. The approach has received a quantum of justifiable criticism for these shortcomings (e.g. Meyerson 1978, Morley 1980) but as Roe (1983) has pointed out although used from a largely individualistic standpoint hitherto, there is nothing to prevent us from applying the terms of uses and gratifications analysis to social groups or even subcultures. Such an operationalization would build a useful bridge between contemporary media research and more general structural-cultural approaches in sociology.

Recent developments in cultural sociology (see Williams 1981) attempt to employ a concept of culture, its production, reproduction and transmission, which is related to the structural relations of society in all their constituents. Such an approach makes it possible to focus specifically on social groups and views humans not just as passive, homogeneous, acted upon, indiscriminate masses of individual consumers but as active, selecting, resisting and differentiating users (and here we see the points of contact with 'uses and gratifications' research). Simple transmission models are rejected and replaced by models which attempt to take account of all the signifying mediations of family, class, age, sex, schooling, peer involvement etc. By operationalizing such a concept of culture we may tackle the complexities involved in the study of communications without the hindrances of the 'mass society/mass culture' metaphors.

This 'structural-cultural' approach owes much to the work on subcultures originating from studies of delinquency (e.g. Cohen 1955), and then extended to the study of youth in general (see e.g. Gordon 1971, Murdock and McCron 1976, Roberts 1980). The fruits of this research tradition are perhaps best represented by the work of the Centre For Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England (see e.g.

Clarke 1974, Willis 1977, 1978, Morley 1980 etc.). In addition it draws heavily from the work of Bourdieu and his associates (Bourdieu 1967, 1977a, 1977b, Bourdieu and Passeron 1978, 1979). In amplifying his telling analyses of the individuals' relation to culture Bourdieu has highlighted the vital mediating role played by the school in the cultivation and acquisition of cultural tastes and competences.

The role of the school in the study of cultural patterns has been further amplified by Morley (1980). He sees the school as the key to the analysis of the media audience since it is a major determinant of the 'cultural codes and competences acquired by the audience'. There is, it is claimed, a 'close relationship between degrees of education and choices of media material', a relationship which enables us to accommodate the complexity of the audience and which facilitates analyses of subgroups within the audience. At the same time, claims Morley, such an approach enables us to stay clear of a, 'substantialist mode of analysis', which sees 'culture' as automatically determined by social position (Morley 1980, p 8).

Empirical applications of the general structural-cultural perspective to the uses people have for the media of communication have shown its heuristic value. An interesting early hybrid of subcultural analysis and the uses and gratifications approach, and which is relevant to the study of video and youth, was provided by Dembo (1972, 1973) and Dembo and Hewitt (1974). According to this approach it is through their negotiations with family, peers and the demands for achievement that adolescents acquire the bases of their social world, including a structure of gratification needs which influence social action and selection of media. Differential experiences lead some adolescents into a search for the self-esteem and identity not provided by legitimated social agencies and, in association, a search for alternative gratifications is stimulated. According to this view media preferences should be seen as the dependent variables and the socio-cultural structure seen as the independent variable (Dembo 1972).

A more specific and detailed structural-cultural analysis of communications media has been presented by Piepe et al. (1975, 1978). Confirming the weaknesses of viewing the audience as collections of individuals abstracted from social context and of ignoring the mediating role of the social structure they posit a culture-communication model that sees communications as refracted only through the mediating influences

of the social milieux. When, for example, societies are segmented into class subcultures it cannot be assumed that people share the same mental world. The results of the studies indicate, for instance, that TV use is located within 'personal and social contexts' which structure and redirect its influence. Within these contexts influence is variable and messages received in numerous ways.

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that the way in which we view the media audience has the most important consequences for any analysis of the communications media. In particular the abandonment of the 'mass' metaphors opens up new universes of inquiry in communications research. In place of the mass, homogeneous, passive audience we have posited the differentiated, heterogeneous, active, selecting audience. In place of the individualistic effects perspective we have posited a uses and gratifications perspective which takes account of the structural-cultural mediations of family, class, neighbourhood, subculture, schooling and peer group. This is by no means to deny that media may have various effects but to argue that these effects do not come directly and unmediated to the individual from whatever medium is being attended to. There is no necessary conflict between 'uses' and 'effects', rather they should be treated as complementary aspects of a single phenomenon (for discussion of a possible uses and effects model, see Windahl 1979).

The essence of the approach being advocated is the abandonment of all 'mass' categories and the analysis of media relations in terms of both a differentiated audience and a differentiation of the media. In practice it involves identifying and analysing a clear social group and the media it uses. In order to achieve this a number of levels of analysis are possible. First it is obviously necessary to pursue what Willis (1980) has termed the 'indexical' level of analysis in order to identify a group and its media uses. Next comes the 'homological' level at which one analyzes how these media uses and preferences are related to the values and feelings of the social group involved with them. Thirdly, there is postulated an 'integral level' at which one analyzes the ways in which the media and the audience 'directly influence and modify one another' (Willis 1980).

In this paper it is only proposed to explore the first two levels, the indexical and the homological, in the analysis of adolescents' uses of video. Consequently the next two sections will present data to illustrate these relationships. Following that some attention will be di-

rected to the question of the effects of video use.

VIDEO AND YOUTH: THE INDEXICAL LEVEL OF CULTURAL RELATION

Before beginning our detailed examination of adolescents' uses of video a short description of the project from which the data are drawn will help to set that data in context. The data presented in this paper are drawn from the project 'Media Panel'. The Media Panel is a research programme conducted at the Department of Sociology, The University of Lund, and the Department for Information Techniques, The University College of Växjö. It is based on two research panels, one panel originally consisting of nursery school children and their parents, the other of children aged between 10 and 15 attending the basic school. The research programme is described in Rosengren and Windahl (1978). The data for this report are taken from the basic school panel based in Växjö, a town of 65,000 inhabitants situated in Southern Sweden. The population of this panel consists of adolescents from 11 to 15 years old. The study has a longitudinal design over a time span of four years, three research waves, with two years interval. In December 1980 and March 1981 self-administered questionnaires were presented in the classroom thereby completing the data collection stage of the third research wave. The latter data collection included questions on video use. In addition the pupils contemporaneous school marks were collected in all subjects. In the autumn of 1982 a follow up was done on those respondents in the 7th class (who by this time were in the 9th - approximately 15 years old) who had answered that they tended to watch video. Approximately 50 of these were selected for in-depth group interviews designed to learn more about their video uses and preferences. It is these sets of data which essentially provide the material employed in this paper. The video data from the 1981 collection have already been fully discussed in Roe (1981). The material from the in-depth interviews of autumn 1982 is up to now unpublished. It will be dealt with more fully in Roe and Salomonsson (1983).

The Växjö panel for the third research wave of the study consisted of 945 children, 464 in the 9th grade (approx. 15 years old) forming the main panel who had been followed from when they were 11 years of age, 244 children in the 7th grade (approx. 13 years old), and 237 children in the 5th grade. As stated 46 of the 7th grade pupils were subsequently interviewed on tape a year and a half later. Other interviews with

adolescents are also occasionally cited.

The first task is obviously to ascertain the extent of video viewing in the group and to analyze the data according to the traditional sociological variables of age, sex and social background. The results showed that even at that early stage in the introduction of video onto the market a significant proportion of adolescents reported that they viewed. Between 31 % (9th graders) and 42 % (7th graders) reported tending to view video. Few sex differences were apparent in the data. Wall and Cederblad (1981), however, in a study of Stockholm youth reported that heavy viewers tend to be boys.

Clear differences according to sex were apparent in the Växjö data in terms of what was viewed. Both sexes appeared to like watching films in general. In terms of more specific contents, however, sharp differences were found. Boys tended to name 'violence' much more than girls and pornography was almost completely a male interest. Boys also tended more often to mention war and adventure films while horror films seemed to be liked by both sexes. Girls tended more often to use video for taping and viewing direct-broadcast television programmes. In general though the 'home cinema' function of video predominated.

Generally video viewing was found to have the same type of relationship to social background as for example TV (see Hedinson 1981) with working class respondents viewing more than middle class respondents, although the differences were not large. If we analyze the data by both social class and sex, however, it becomes apparent that while the working class pattern remains fairly regular over the three age groups, the middle class pattern is much less consistent varying between 40 % of middle class 13 year old boys reporting video viewing and only 13 % of middle class 15 year old girls (see Flodin et al. 1982). Clearly generalizations are hazardous and it is necessary to continually specify the age, sex and social class that one is referring to.

As we noted earlier media use very often has a group dimension. Consequently the respondents were asked with whom they mostly watched video. The results showed overwhelmingly that when young people view video they do so in own age peer groups and largely in the absence of parents and siblings (see Table 1 below). TV viewing tends to be a family based activity and these results indicate an important difference between the two media.

Table 1. With Whom Do You Mostly Watch Video? By school grade.

Answer alternative	5th grade %	7th grade %	9th grade %
Parents	13	9	2
Siblings	3	7	7
Friends	71	75	77
Parents & Siblings	5	2	3
Siblings & Friends	2	2	4
Parents, Siblings & Friends	5	4	6
Parents & Friends	1	1	1
	100	100	100

Source: Roe (1981 p 20).

Table one shows the startling fact that of the 9th grade viewers of video only 2% state that they view with their parents as opposed to 77 % who state that they view with friends. It is clear from this that video is very much a peer based activity and tends to become increasingly so with age. The later interviews revealed that the most common viewing group was comprised of 5-6 adolescents with very occasionally larger groups for very popular films. In general, however, these larger group viewings were disliked because it made concentration on the film too difficult. Watching alone, while not infrequent, was considered to be rather boring and less preferable to watching in a small group of friends.

The relationship to TV viewing was also found to be interesting. While low TV users tended to be low video users there was little difference in the propensities of 'medium' and 'high' TV users to use video. Moreover, closer analysis revealed some interesting subgroup patterns. For example those who were 'low' TV users were most likely to report watching 'violence' on video. The same was also true for the categories of horror films and pornography (Roe 1981). On the other hand the 'low' TV group was also most liable to use video to record television programmes. Clearly there are two groups of 'low' TV video users, the first don't attend to TV and use video to actively select those programmes that are occasionally desired in order to fit viewing into their pattern of

activities. The other group uses video to view material not available on TV. Thus what may be called 'cause for concern content' is associated with a low level of TV use rather than (as one might otherwise expect from regarding all visual media as more or less the same) a high level of TV use. Clearly for this group orthodox TV content is unstimulating and so they utilize video in order to be able to view alternative contents. This contention was supported by the subsequent interviews which revealed an almost universal condemnation of Swedish TV's output expressed often with considerable feeling. The following was typical of reactions to conventional TV amongst a group of boys:

Q. 'What do you think about Swedish TV?'

A. - 'Hopeless'

- 'Bad'

- 'It's the absolute bottom'

- 'Bad'

- 'You'd have to look for worse TV'

A large part of the public outcry against adolescents' uses of video has concentrated on the types of content viewed by video users. Our respondents were therefore asked 'what do you normally see on video?' This was an open ended question and the resulting programme categories are presented in Table 2 below (it should be noted first that all reported types of content were ranked equally, not into first or second choice, etc., and secondly that these are the respondents' own terms for what they see, there has been no subsequent coding by the researcher).

The results from Table 2 show clearly that there is a considerable difference in viewing preferences according to age. In the 5th grade (11 years of age) the most popular category is 'cartoons'. With age, however, other interests arise and 'violence', 'adventure films', and 'pornography' increase in popularity. It is also interesting to note that 'horror films' are rather popular right across the age range constituting in fact the only really stable category. Most noteworthy is the fact that what can be termed 'cause for concern' content is top of the 9th grade (15 years old) viewing list. 'Violence' (the respondents own term for what they see), 'adventure', 'pornography' and 'horror' as well as the interesting 'everything possible' are amongst the most oft-mentioned 9th grade categories.

The picture that begins to emerge concerning adolescents' patterns of video use shows that, in terms of the video content debate, the group

Table 2. 'What Do You See On Video?'

Programme category	5th grade	Tend to see % 7th grade	9th grade
Films	18	32	18
Horror films	16	18	17
Adventure films	10	10	15
Violence	5	3	18
Detective/Crime	22	12	11
Cartoons	25	5	2
Westerns	10	12	9
Recorded TV programmes	10	13	14
'Everything possible'	4	7	16
Pornography	4	7	15
Thrillers	10	6	4
Comedy	10	2	8
War films	2	7	6
Music	2	7	5
Karate/Kung Fu	2	0	2
Sport	2	1	3

Source: Roe (1981 p 21-22).

most 'at risk' would appear to be a section of 15 year olds (probably boys) who use video within a specific peer group context as an alternative to orthodox TV. It should also be noted, however, that at the time at which these data were collected the material available for hire was dominated by precisely this type of material so that to some extent viewing was determined by what was available to the viewer. The subsequent follow-up interviews have revealed a considerable diversification of viewing preferences now that more and more 'quality' films and other sorts of contents are available in the video hire boutiques. In addition many admitted to viewing less now than previously, the initial high level of viewing being at least partially a product of the novelty of a new 'craze'. While 'problematic' content was still extensively viewed it no longer dominated the reported viewing preferences of the adolescents interviewed.

As we noted earlier school achievement has been hypothesized as an important determining variable in the media audience. Roe (1983) has explored this hypothesis in relation to various media in a doctoral dissertation and found considerable support for it. School achievement data were also related to video viewing in Roe (1981) and a number of interesting results were obtained.

The school marks of the 9th grade respondents were examined in relation to the reported propensity to view video. The range of possible marks is from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) and they were awarded to the students at the end of the autumn term of 1980 approximately three months before the video questions were administered. These results (see Roe 1981, p 24) showed a clear relationship between school achievement in Swedish and reported propensity to view video, with a clear tendency for low achievers to use video more than high achievers.

The marks in Swedish were then related to the types of programmes which those pupils who saw video reported viewing. Eight of the programmes most frequently named were examined in terms of the school marks. The results indicated a very interesting differential viewing pattern according to school achievement. 'Violence', 'war films', and 'horror films' were all clearly associated with low achievement. A second identifiable relationship was that between high school marks and the viewing of recorded TV programmes. Indeed of all the categories analyzed it alone claimed pupils with the highest academic mark. A third group consisting of 'detective', 'adventure', 'pornography' and a general category of 'films' were all more or less normally distributed according to school marks (see Roe 1981 pp 24-25). These latter content categories thus appear to be generally popular across the academic achievement range while the other four categories are significantly related to school achievement.

This school data therefore helps us better to contextualize the viewers of 'cause for concern' material. Besides school achievement video viewing was also found to be related to positive or negative attitudes to earlier or later school leaving and to reported propensity to do homework. Wall and Cederblad (1981) in their Stockholm research also reported that video viewers were more likely to play truant. Taken altogether these results indicate that there exists a small group of under-achieving, negative to school boys who are heavy video users and are especially involved with violent or horrific material. It is hypothesized that this group constitutes one variant of the anti-school adolescent subculture system. Other variants of this negative response to

school include involvement with socially disapproved music subcultures, drug taking, delinquency, vandalism etc. Sociologically the mechanism is not new although its specific expression in video use, obviously, is.

One important point should be borne in mind here. The orthodox perspective of the relationship between media of communications and the school is a uni-directional one which posits media as having harmful effects upon aspects of school achievement and experience rather than vice versa. Roe (1983) has challenged this oversimplified uni-directional flow of cause and effect and posited the school as determining media use instead. The results presented here support this position. It should be recalled that the respondents dealt with here had already been in school for years before video came. Furthermore the low achievers already had low marks long before video arrived. Indeed it was precisely the low achievers who were the first to appropriate the new medium for socially disapproved types of content. In this case then it is clear that school failure and negativity led to video viewing and preferences (through the mediation of the peer group) rather than the other way round. Roe (1983) has also shown that a similar causal mechanism operates with regard to preference for socially disapproved music such as punk or hard rock. All of these results argue strongly for inserting the determining role of school experience more consistently into our analyses of adolescents media uses and gratifications.

We have now fulfilled the criteria for analysis with which we began this discussion, namely, the identification of a specific group (in its sociological context) and the media content it uses. The next stage was to analyze how these uses and preferences are related to the values and feelings of the social group involved with them and it is to this that we shall now turn.

VIDEO AND YOUTH: THE HOMOLOGICAL LEVEL OF CULTURAL RELATION

We have identified a particular social group and a range of contents but what of the medium itself? What is it in the nature of a medium which leads it to be successfully adopted into widespread use? How do the social possibilities engendered by a new medium stand in relation to existing media? If we are to understand the relationship between an audience and its preferred media we must attempt to answer

some of these questions.

Roe (1981) in an historical analysis of the electronic media environment has stressed the importance of the dual concepts of 'choice' and 'control' in media uses. If we look at the visual media, say from the cinema through TV to video, and at the aural media from the wireless to the sound cassette, we see that each successful new medium increased the consumers' opportunities along one or both of these dimensions. TV brought pictures into the home giving more variety of content and greatly increased opportunities to control the viewing situation. Transistor radios gave mobility and a similar chance to control the listening situation while the gramophone greatly increased our opportunities for choice of content and control over the time and place of listening. Later the portable cassette enabled the listener to take his music with him wherever s/he went. The development of video should be seen in this context. In contrast to the cinema or even direct broadcast TV one can choose and control where, when, how and what to see.

These elements of choice and control are especially significant in adolescence. Adolescence is that period of life when the move away from family and the pre-occupation with peers, besides the increasing needs for personal autonomy, make control over various aspects of leisure a vital concern. Adolescents' peculiar uses of popular music show clearly the operation of these concerns. Music is employed for identity, as a means to group interaction, for courting (dancing) and, not least, to exclude adults. As Denisov (1975) has stressed 'pop' is essentially youthful. Other media, however, tend to be dominated by adults. There is no doubt that TV for example is an 'adult' medium in this sense. So too, with a number of exceptions (e.g. 'Grease'), is the cinema. As Willis (1978) has stressed, however, a medium can always be appropriated by a group and used in unexpected ways not comprehended by 'dominant' groups. In respect to existing media these possibilities are limited since these media are likely to be 'policed' by the dominant culture (in 'pop' for example, by banning records from the vital radio channels). New media, however, provide excellent opportunities for subcultures or groups to appropriate the new forms at least until the uncomprehending 'policing agencies' of the mainstream culture move in and realize the potential of the new form.

The history of adolescent uses of video in Sweden provides an excellent illustration of this process. The new medium, with its greatly

increased opportunities for user control and choice, was in its early years, appropriated by anti-school youth for the purposes of viewing types of content not available to young people in the other media. It should be stressed that this appropriation was an active selection, even perhaps a functional one in terms of individual and group identity. It was no 'massacre of the innocents', but rather, a deliberate signal of distance, of disapprobation with a dominant adult culture which had judged and rejected these young people as 'failures', as not worthy of socially certificated esteem.

The respondents were generally well aware of societies' 'policing' of media and other activities. They were mostly very negative to any form of censorship or film cutting believing instead in individual autonomy and self responsibility. Attempts by 'authority' to control video were particularly resented,

A :- "Something I reacted against, something I saw on TV it was. It was one of these debates about video violence and all that - there was a guy who talked about banning it ..."

B :- "That was Wickström* that was."

A :- "Then they asked him if he had seen any films himself - of course he hadn't. He didn't know a thing about what he was talking about - he hadn't seen a single film, but he wanted to ban them."

C :- "He didn't even know what video was."

A :- "I don't understand what all these bans and restrictions are good for. It just makes everything more exciting."

Or as one 15 year old boy pithily put it,

".... that's what Swedes are best at I think - age limits. Age limits on everything. Forbid everything here - hell soon you won't be able to buy a packet of juicy fruits until you are 15."

In actual fact the controls over content and age for hiring were seen as being quite ineffective. Few had ever experienced difficulty in obtaining whatever films they wanted. Some shops merely kept the 'nasties' under the counter and in any case there was a circulation of pirate copies if you were 'in the know'. This ineffectiveness was often compared to the ineffectiveness of the alcohol restric-

* The then Minister for Education and Culture

tions - you could always get hold of some if you wanted to.

Any activity should be seen in the context of what alternatives are available. The interviews with 15-16 year olds revealed that video viewing helped to fill a gap in their leisure time. Almost all expressed deep dissatisfaction with the facilities available to them for entertainment etc. They experienced themselves as being in some sense in an 'age between' for which no provision had been made. They felt themselves too old for youth clubs and were too young to get into adult places of entertainment. One solution was to occupy the public parks and streets (the latter especially on weekend evenings). Another was to populate the 'flipper' halls and billiard rooms. In this scarcity of available entertainment (and it should be remembered that Växjö is a smallish town) video viewing provided a cheap and exciting alternative for the adolescent peer group. Video's relative cheapness was a recurrent motivation for viewing. If one shared the cost of hiring a film between five or six the cost per person fell well within the average budget. This aspect was especially important in relation to cinema going which was generally very popular and in many cases much preferred to video viewing. The most frequent complaint was, however, that the cinema was far too expensive. There can be no doubt that the cinema has priced itself out of a large potential audience in this age group.

The presence or not of realistic alternatives is shown clearly by the marked seasonal nature of video viewing. It was, generally, a winter activity which fell off markedly when the lighter warmer evenings arrived and one could be out with friends. Viewing also tended to be concentrated at the weekends, especially on Friday and Saturday evenings. This is perhaps not surprising but it also has one important aspect for it is on those evenings that parents are most likely not to be at home so that the family TV of one member of the peer group can be utilized for video without adult interference. As we saw on p 9 video viewing is overwhelmingly a peer group activity. The interviews revealed that parents were most definitely not wanted when viewing took place, firstly because it was a peer group 'thing' and secondly because many parents (but by no means all) would not approve of the types of films being viewed. As one girl put it, "Parents don't always know what kinds of films you hire you watch them when they aren't at home."

We saw on p 11 that video viewing, especially of violent and horro-

fic material, tended to be associated with lower school achievement. A number of the interviewees stressed the negative effects of 'failure' on the individual,

A :- "You get to feel worthless - it's hellish - it feels like you are being pushed down it's just brainwashing."

S :- "Yes it's a real brainwashing."

A :- "You get completely depressed. I believe, I believe much more in encouragement encourage them instead of knocking them down. I promise it would be much much better."

There was no evidence in the interviews that video viewing caused greater truancy or the doing of less homework. While most had truanted and had occasionally viewed video during that time all denied that video viewing was ever a motivation for truanting. One played truant because school, or most often certain lessons, were boring and meaningless. In other words truancy is a 'push' phenomenon from the school rather than a 'pull' phenomenon from the lure of video (or anything else). On the question of video's effect on homework the following reply is perhaps the best comment,

Q :- "You wouldn't have done homework even if you hadn't watched video?"

A :- "I never do homework anyway so I don't know."

An extremely important aspect of adolescents' video use concerns differences between the sexes. It is clear from the interviews that the viewing of 'cause for concern' material is especially a male inspired phenomenon which plays a very specific role within the adolescent boy peer group and which is a source of continual friction between the sexes. To begin with the initiative for viewing and choice of film generally comes from the boys. Girls appear to play a secondary role. It was seen as unusual for groups of girls to themselves take the initiative or to watch in all girl groups:

Q :- "When one talks to the girls about these things they say that it is always the lads who decide. That they never get to say what films to watch."

A :- "Yes but it's us that do the hiring. It's the guys who do the hiring."

A :- "Yes exactly."

- " It's always the guys who do the paying."

- "Yes exactly. They've got no right to say anything if they don't ever hire films themselves."

Q :- "Do you think that the girls watch together in all girls groups in the same way as you watch all lads together?"

A :- (all) "No."

- ".... They never sit together in a group and watch unless they've got guys there."

- " It's pretty strange really."

- "Yes because there are lot of guys who do it."

Q :- "Why is that. Don't they have the money? Or don't they want to spend it?"

A :- "Yeah. Of course they have."

- "They are just not so interested. I just don't think they are interested in the same way."

- "They sit and talk shit instead."

- "They sit and talk a load of crap with each other."

The girls often complain that the boys only want to watch pornography or violence films and not what the girls want to watch most, which is 'romantic' films. A number of interesting aspects of the adolescent social group as a whole and its relation to video content in particular are illustrated in these patterns.

In the first place viewing of extreme violence appears to be largely based on group pressure, a form of 'test of manhood'. Wall and Cederblad (1981) found that those types of contents which adolescents said they liked to watch and those they said they actually watched were quite different. Violence, especially figured largely in what was watched but was not liked. In the Växjö interviews a number of groups brought this question up. One group of boys stated,

- "Of course you feel the group pressure if you can call it that. You don't want to show yourself up before your friends by saying anything."

- "No you don't want to do that."

- "Yes, then they say what a coward you are."

- "Yes, there's nobody who wants to show how they feel."

- "No they don't dare "

- "No you don't dare do that."

This fear of ridicule if one dares to show what one really thinks of tough scenes was a recurring theme in the interviews. It was also clear that in reality these films were neither liked nor understood,

Q :- "Why do you watch 'nasties' when you know you'll feel bad afterwards?"

A :- "It's because everyone else sits and watches."

Q :- "So, it's because everyone else does it?"

A :- "(All) "Yes."

- "There was one film, 'Exterminated' where they used a meat mincer. A man fell into it and then came out as minced meat. It looked really grisly."
- "That was number one in the video top 20 for a long time."
- "It's that kind of thing you can't really understand properly."
- "But they're making a new one 'Exterminated 2'."

The girls are much more ready to condemn gratuitous violence in video films:

Q :- "Why do you think such nasty things are made?"

A :- "I don't know, I can't think of any good reason for it."

- "I can't understand how it's fun to watch such films."
- "No, nor can I. They're horrible."
- "They're sick."
- "(All) "Yes."

As one girl asked uncomprehendingly,

- "I saw a film a few years ago where a ten year old little boy chopped up his mother's lover with a bloody great meat cleaver How can you have something like that?"

Another group of girls stressed how many, especially the boys, had to act tough,

- "Some of them just want to show how tough they are. Sort of 'Yeah this is nothing. I can take this.' "
- "That's terrible."
- "Yes, but there are some like that."

Q :- "Do the lads get scared as well?"

A :- "Yes I think they do."

- "It depends on whether you are, for example, if a boy is going out with a girl or something and he dares to trust her - so then he can say, 'I'm scared. I don't like films like that.' And he knows that the girl won't go and tell everybody that he's scared of films like that, he daren't go and watch films like that."
- "Yes, but I think it's really good if he dares to say that."
- (All) "Yes it is."
- "Because most often they pretend, like 'Me scared? No.' "
- "There are some who'll say right out, 'I don't want to watch that film because I think it's bad.' There are some who'll say right out."
- "But not many."
- (All) "No."

Much is made by both sexes of the girls' always wanting to see romantic 'weepy' films. For the boys this draws forth only contempt,

Q :- "Is that what they want to see, romantic films?"

A :- "Yeah, that's all."

- "Not Porn films."
- "No they don't. The girls don't like films like that."
- "They just like to sit there bawling their eyes out."
- "Weepy films."
- "The sofa gets wet."

For the girls romantic films give a gratification in the release of feelings, 'we just sat there all the way through bawling our eyes out.' While romantic films are preferred other films may also be used for this purpose,

Q :- "Can that sort of thing be fun?"

A :- "You don't go to see a horror film to have fun. You go there to get a release for your feelings. If you have been stressed and tense the whole day and you can't release it you can't go out onto the lawn and scream and shout, to get rid of it. But you can go and see a horror film and then you get rid of these feelings."

If the boys were contemptuous of the girls for watching weepy romantic films the girls were equally contemptuous of the boys' 'fear' for this type of film,

Q :- "Why don't the boys want to see romantic films?"

A :- "They daren't show them, they daren't let everyone see that they can cry as well."

Another group remarked,

- "Maybe they do like them (romantic films) but they don't dare show that they do."
- "Yes. They always want to see these films where there is something happening all the time. They've got such poor concentration. They can't sit still. There has to be something exciting happening the whole time."

Pornography, perhaps unexpectedly, was generally disliked by both sexes. For the boys it seemed to be a short phase through which one went but which quickly became very boring. The most frequent comment from both sexes was that porn was boring and always the same thing. Never any story, 'they just go at it all the time.' 'Young lads and dirty old men' seemed to be the general opinion of who made up the pornography audience. Some girls reacted more strongly against pornography,

- "It's so bloody hard and non-stop the whole time."
- "... Young lads can perhaps get a wrong idea of what it's like."
- "That they have to be like that."
- "It can influence them if they see too much."
- "Or it can frighten young girls."

Others clearly saw the discrimination aspect of pornography and even violent films. It was always the girls who get chased and murdered. It's always mostly girls in the porn films,

- "It's mostly girls in porn films mostly good looking girls."
- "There aren't nearly so many good looking men as there are girls."
- "It's the same in these porn papers it's the same thing,

it's the girl who is undervalued all the time, getting an inferiority complex and everything."

- "And the lads sit there and say 'hell you don't look like that. Why are you so fat?' So the girls go and watch - 'oh god, should I look like that?' So then they go on one of these diets."

One distinction which all groups made, boys and girls, was between 'porn' and 'gladporn' ('Happyporn' - a predominantly Danish form of pornography set in humorous contexts). 'Gladporn' was liked because it tended to have a story and wasn't just mechanical continuous sex. Such fine distinctions were also made for other content types and indicate the selecting discriminating nature of the video audience.

It should be clear from the above discussion that video viewing, especially of certain types of content fulfills a number of special functions in the adolescent milieu. Firstly it is available and cheap. Secondly it provides opportunities to exercise autonomy and provides a focus around which the peer group may organize its activities. Thirdly, it is relatively free from adult and general cultural policing. It is admirably suited for the purposes of excluding parents. Fourthly it operates as a special form of 'toughness', 'manlihood' test in the male peer group by which individuals may show their calibre and worth to their contemporaries. Fifthly it provides an 'anti-establishment' profile which generates social disapproval in the adult dominant culture. For those who have been denigrated by the system video viewing of socially despised material gives a chance to express their own disapprobation with that system and its accredited representatives. The video audience for this age group is self selected. It is an active audience which uses video to achieve various more or less clearly perceived gratifications and as an aid to group formation and identification. While video use is functional for the individual, however, it may be dysfunctional for society. For while the users perspective sees the audience and its media as in dynamic interaction with each other, this is not to discount the possible effects of this interaction both for the individual and society at large. What we have been discussing so far can generally be regarded as more or less 'positive' effects for the individuals and groups involved. We should now turn to a consideration of the 'negative' effects which viewing of violent or horrific material may have.

VIDEO AND YOUTH: THE EFFECTS OF VIEWING

In the interviews on video viewing many adolescents expressed their feelings of revulsion and fear in connection with watching video, violence, and horror, especially the girls - who as we have seen tend to be more honest in this respect. Often these feelings are accompanied by physical symptoms,

- "I saw once a head being blown up I thought I'd die. I had a headache the whole night."

Stated one girl, while one unusually forthright boy stated,

- "There are those really nasty ones where they tear open the stomach and throw all the guts over the floor and that. That's nasty to see."
- "Yes, you feel ill."

One group of boys described their feelings after tough films in the following way,

- "You feel a bit tired"
- "And a bit heavy"
- "Yes, a little tired, you're tired"
- "You go the toilet and feel ill."
- "You daren't go down the stairs."

Girls tend to report that they experience fear after viewing, especially on the way home,

Q :- "Are you ever frightened after seeing a horror film?"

A :- "Yes, if you have just seen a horror film and you are walking home and you see a guy in dark clothes - you jump so much."

Antidotes to fear can come from unlikely sources,

Q :- "What do you do when you get scared?"

A :- "I talk to myself and think about Donald Duck."

- "I don't dare walk home after I've seen a horror film."

Q :- "What do you do then, stay the night?"

A :- "No, you watch something else if there is anything - Donald Duck or something so that you forget. Or you stay and chat with your friends about something else but then when you go out you run you always look in the shadows."

Or, another girl,

- "I'm so silly because I'm afraid of the dark shit-scared. So I turn out the light and I can't sleep - really horrible If I watch a film I have to have the tape recorder on or the radio all night For Example, I remember my friend and I, mum and dad had gone to the summer cottage and so we were alone at home. We had been to my sister's place and watched one of these real horror films. It was about some people from another planet or something. They came from another planet with masses of nasty sores on their faces and things like that and they made love and they sucked blood and that. They came and cut peoples throats and that. So we sat there and watched and then we went home. Then it was time to go to bed. So we decided to sleep in mum and dad's double bed I don't think I slept a wink the whole night. I lay there watching all the time. I was scared something would come. Now I put on every light in the flat when I get home."

Clearly, then, many adolescents are strongly affected by what they view. Perhaps the most telling factor, however, is that some report a disturbing degree of de-sensitization to violence and horror after they have watched a number of films. Many are aware of this and themselves see it as an undesirable feeling,

- "We saw lots of horror films, the first ones especially were just blood massacres the whole time. At first you just sat there afraid to look but in the end you get so used to it that you just sit there and watch when they chop the heads off each other."

Or, as another girl expressed it,

- "But you get almost immune. That's almost the worst actually. The first time you see a real horror film, then you think it's really, really horrible and then, when you've watched and watched, watched violence so much then you don't react so much. That's terrible really."

In the short term the effects of violence or horror are, then, physical symptoms such as headaches or 'feeling ill'. After viewing anxiety, fear and inability to sleep are reported. In the long run the most apparent subjectively experienced effect is desensitization to the content. There can be little doubt that these reactions give cause for concern for the individuals mental and emotional well-being. Some of the material available seems to be of a very realistic and explicit nature. Descriptions of films seen tend to be lurid in the extreme,

- "There was one film, they were on an island. Then there was a doctor. He swopped brains."
- "Ah, that was frightening."
- "Yes, Oh dear, that was so grisly."
- "It was nasty. He changed over a brain. He killed people. Killed people and swopped their brains in and out, like you couldn't believe so they were down on the beach, there was a guy and a girl. They stood on the beach and wanted to get into a boat so then this horrible zombie came. He was so horrible it wasn't true. And then she started screaming. So he picked up that, what's it called? That motor, and pushed it up into her face. You just saw everything spurting."

- (All) "Oh no."

Q :- "Was it a close up short?"

A :- "Yes, you just see everything just spurting - oh it was the nastiest thing I've seen."

- "I think 'Halloween 2' was even more horrible."

This is unsavoury stuff surely, yet is it as a type of content actually new in the history of popular culture? It is important to see such content in its historical context as a development. Video did not invent the bloodthirsty, nor did it invent pornography. We should be reminded of the 19th century Gothic novel and the fact that both photo-

graphy and home movies were first exploited commercially for pornography. It can be argued that moving colour close up pictures exaggerate the impact and effect that such material can have on the viewer but we should not be carried away in our concern over video to the extent of imagining that it is anything new in these respects. Compare the above description of a video film with the following for example,

"As he came our great Englishman gathered himself together, and, swinging the heavy axe round his head, hit at him with all his force. There was a shriek of excitement from a thousand throats, and behold, Twala's head seemed to spring from his shoulders, and then fell and came rolling and bounding along the ground towards Ignosi, stopping just at his feet. For a second the corpse stood upright, the blood spouting in fountains from the severed arteries, then with a dull crash it fell to the earth, and the gold torque from the neck went rolling away across the pavement. As it did so, Sir Henry, overpowered by faintness and loss of blood, fell heavily across it." (H. Rider Haggard 1886, p 214.)

This excerpt is taken from 'King Solomon's Mines' published a hundred years ago. It was a favourite of popular literature especially amongst young boys and was used for teaching English in Swedish schools in the first decades of this century.

The point is not necessarily to defend this type of lurid imagery, but to set it in an historical and cultural context, namely of adolescent, largely male working class, popular culture, for it is only within the framework of such a context that the (or any other) phenomenon may be adequately explained and understood.

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